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**Evaluation of UNCTAD activities**

# Evaluation of UNCTAD activities: Overview

**Report by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD**

## Introduction

1. This report provides an overview of the external evaluations of UNCTAD programmes and projects undertaken between January 2013 and March 2014. This information is presented to allow more in-depth reporting on all evaluation activities and is a move towards strengthening accountability and lessons learned.

## I. Summary of evaluation findings

2. Evaluations at UNCTAD are conducted against the criteria of relevance, effectiveness (including impact), efficiency and sustainability, consistent with the standards outlined by the United Nations Evaluation Group. The objectives of such assessments are to draw conclusions on the work implemented, to make recommendations on any enhancements needed and to identify lessons learned. Such information can help inform the design, planning and implementation of future work.

3. Five evaluations were conducted in the period considered in this report. The following paragraphs elaborate on the key findings, recommendations and lessons learned from these evaluations.

### A. Evaluation of subprogramme 1: Globalization, interdependence and development, 2008–2012

4. The fifty-sixth executive session of the Trade and Development Board requested an independent evaluation of the UNCTAD subprogramme on

globalization, interdependence and development, with the objective of assessing the relevance, effectiveness (including impact) and efficiency of work of the subprogramme during the period 2008–2012 in relation to its mandates, and proposing enhancements as appropriate.

5. The evaluation found that the subprogramme had played its role as a think tank on globalization and development for the United Nations system and that the products of the subprogramme were generally of high quality and appreciated by member States. The evaluation highlighted that the subprogramme had produced a remarkable body of research with limited staff resources. The evaluation also observed that the subprogramme had exploited synergies between the three pillars of its work to effectively achieve its goals. However, the evaluation also pointed out that synergies across divisional and organizational boundaries needed further improvement. It mentioned that assessing the impact of the subprogramme's messages on globalization policies remains difficult, though the messages have worked their way through United Nations intergovernmental processes. It further pointed out that outreach methods to member States for its policy messages could be more effective and that the consensus-building potential of the subprogramme had not been fully exploited. Finally, the evaluation observed that the subprogramme's existing results framework is not suitable as a management tool for the subprogramme, as the performance indicators do not satisfactorily measure achievements.

6. On the basis of its findings, the evaluation team made the following recommendations: (a) develop a meaningful results-based management approach to guide the subprogramme's work; (b) establish an integrated UNCTAD research agenda around development-centred globalization; (c) adjust the research focus of the *Trade and Development Report*, whereby future reports could have two parts: i) monitoring trends and issues in the global economic environment; ii) providing comparative analysis of the influence of trade and interrelated issues on sustainable development from a developing country perspective; (d) promote increased capacity-building for development-centred globalization within the United Nations development pillar.

7. In its management response to the evaluation (TD/B/WP(65)/CRP.1), the secretariat noted the acceptance of recommendations (a) and (d), but only partial acceptance of recommendations (b) and (c), citing feasibility concerns.

8. The evaluation report, together with the management response from UNCTAD, formed the basis for discussion at the sixty-fifth session of the Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget. Member States stressed the importance of the work of subprogramme 1 and highlighted its relevance in promoting economic policies and strategies for the sustainable and beneficial integration of developing countries into the interdependent global economy. Following further consideration of and consultations on the report and the management response, member States at the sixty-sixth session of the Working Party endorsed the findings of the evaluation team and requested the secretariat to implement the recommendations of the evaluation within UNCTAD's mandate, as appropriate. The secretariat was requested to report on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations at the sixty-eighth session of the Working Party. In addition, member States welcomed the efforts of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to enhance research coordination and synergy within the secretariat on the preparation of flagship publications.

## B. Evaluation of development account projects

9. External evaluations of the following four projects that were supported by the seventh tranche of the United Nations Development Account were also completed: (a) Strengthening capacities of developing countries in Africa and Asia to support their effective participation in negotiating bilateral, regional and multilateral trade facilitation arrangements (project 10/11AU); (b) International cooperation to develop a global monitoring system in national investment policies (project 10/11AK); (c) Strengthening capacities in developing countries for the effective enforcement of competition law to minimize constraints to economic productivity (project 10/11O); (d) Integration of the trade dimension in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (project 10/11S) and Enhancing national ownership of trade-related assistance in United Nations country-level development plans (project 10/11AV).

### (i) External evaluation: Strengthening capacities of developing countries in Africa and Asia to support their effective participation in negotiating bilateral, regional and multilateral trade facilitation arrangements (United Nations Development Account, project 10/11AU)

10. This project aimed to enhance the capacity of select landlocked and transit developing countries in East Africa and South Asia to design, manage and implement regional trade facilitation commitments in such a manner that they are coherent with trade facilitation measures contained in the negotiated World Trade Organization agreement on trade facilitation and aligned with national policies and frameworks.

11. The main activities of the project were fact-finding and advisory missions to the six project countries, followed by the development of training materials and the organization of six national workshops, four regional cluster meetings and an interregional forum held in Geneva, Switzerland. The project also leveraged an existing platform for sharing best practices. The six countries that benefited from this project were Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

12. The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the project. The evaluator found that the project responded to beneficiaries' needs and was well aligned with UNCTAD mandates and with the objectives of the United Nations Development Account. The evaluator noted that the effectiveness and efficiency of UNCTAD in organizing the project's activities had been appreciated by country representatives involved in the project, who noted the high-quality project management and innovative regional and interregional experiences offered to them. However, the evaluator also observed some shortcomings in the monitoring of the project, which did not allow for a full assessment of the effectiveness of the project.

13. The evaluator further observed that the project was cost-efficient and generated synergies with other UNCTAD projects. With regard to project sustainability, the evaluator commended the higher than usual continuous participation of the relevant beneficiary country representatives throughout the project, with only a few exceptions. In the evaluator's opinion, this sets a basis for ensuring the sustainability of results in the near future. However, the evaluator also noted that the project could have benefited from stronger participation by representatives from the private sector. Based on analysis of the project's achievements to date, the evaluator concluded that the project will lead to concrete and positive impacts for the countries involved.

14. On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations were made: (a) for subsequent projects, UNCTAD should consider coupling its work with

complementary infrastructure projects implemented by other institutions such as the Asian Development Bank, United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank, as infrastructure development was a subject mentioned by many project participants as an unmet need; (b) the project team should make sure that sufficient time is allocated to allow all activities to be fully implemented to the required level of quality; (c) project officers should develop a more thorough monitoring and evaluation system at the start of such projects by preparing a baseline study with which to compare results and should develop a performance measurement framework and use it throughout such projects; (d) the project team should ensure a better alignment of project activities with participants' needs and operational capacities; (e) the project team should develop a follow-up project to this project, on the condition that it greatly build on the results attained and that it obtain commitments from beneficiary countries regarding their further investments in terms of human and financial resources; (f) for future similar projects, private sector involvement throughout the projects should be increased, in order to incorporate their valuable input and improve the sustainability of projects.

### (ii) External evaluation: International cooperation to develop a global monitoring system in national investment policies (United Nations Development Account, project 10/11AK)

15. This project was operational from the second half of 2011 to the first quarter of 2014. The project aimed to establish a global database on investment policies and their impact on development, which would enable policymakers in developing countries and the international community to have access to best practices in investment policies. It also aimed to establish an e-based network for international dialogue on investment policies and best practices. The main activity was the establishment of the Investment Policy Hub and database on investment policies and their impact on development. The project also organized three capacity-building workshops in collaboration with development partners.

16. The evaluation confirmed the considerable relevance of this project, based on survey and interview responses from both internal and external stakeholders. The evaluator found that 68 per cent of users registered on the Investment Policy Hub appreciate the platform's role as a useful "one-stop shop" for issues related to policy investment. The evaluator noted quite positive feedback on specific features of the platform, such as information on the Investment Policy Framework for Sustainable Development and access to investment policy reviews and access to a policy database. The evaluator recognized the validity of the project design and its logical framework, but pointed out the lack of baseline data and specific targets in order to better assess expected accomplishments.

17. With regard to efficiency, the evaluator noted the project's timely completion of all planned activities and full utilization of the project budget. The evaluator also observed that the project had managed to leverage 71.4 per cent of direct costs related to workshops from development partners, which reflects their recognition of the pertinence of the project. With regard to effectiveness, the evaluator noted that at the time that the evaluation was conducted, the project was on track to meet expected accomplishments and that 100 per cent of investment promotion officers who had attended the workshops would recommend the platform to colleagues and friends working in the areas of investment policymaking and/or research and analysis of investment policies. The evaluator observed that there is a high likelihood of sustainability due to the project's close alignment with the strategic priorities of the UNCTAD division that implemented the project.

18. On the basis of the findings, five recommendations were made. First, the project should be used within the implementing division as a good practice example for future project design, including the approach to monitoring through systematic workshop and post-workshop questionnaires and information technology statistics. However, for future projects, the project team should ensure that baselines are available for all expected accomplishments and that quantifiable targets are set. Second, the implementing division should continue monitoring the Investment Policy Hub using the criteria selected for the present evaluation and the evaluation results as a baseline. Third, in order to complement the achievements of the project to date, the implementing division should continue investing in capacity-building workshops involving targeted policymakers through a partnership approach built into project implementation. Fourth, with the launch of the final version of the Investment Policy Hub, the project team should clearly promote the interactive features of the platform, including discussion forums. Fifth, with regard to maintenance of the Investment Policy Hub, the implementing division should continue to prioritize the allocation of staff time to respond to the demand created by the interactive features.

### (iii) External evaluation: Strengthening capacities in developing countries for the effective enforcement of competition law to minimize constraints to economic productivity (United Nations Development Account, project 10/11O)

19. This project aimed to strengthen the capacity of national competition authorities to effectively enforce competition law and to make recommendations for the improvement of their legal and institutional frameworks. The main activity was the completion of nine peer reviews and initiation of a further three peer reviews, together with follow-up activities to implement the recommendations emanating from peer reviews undertaken in two countries prior to the start of the project. This project was operational from 2010 to 2013.

20. The evaluation confirmed the considerable relevance of the project for the countries selected for technical assistance. The evaluator recognized that the intervention logic was coherent and that the components of the peer review processes were relevant. However, the evaluator noted that some adjustments may be necessary to give more weight to follow-up assistance in the overall delivery of UNCTAD peer reviews. The evaluator commended the effectiveness of the project and found that the peer review process was highly appreciated in the beneficiary countries for its quality and the practical recommendations and road maps for the countries. The evaluator observed that the peer review reports had been used for years as references both for legal reforms and for training in the countries involved. The evaluator observed spillover effects from the project, including triggering demand from neighbouring countries to catch up with the countries that had undergone a peer review. The tripartite peer review process in the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe had proven to have a potential contribution to regional cooperation in the field of protecting economic competition.

21. The evaluator confirmed the considerable efficiency of the project and observed that the project had been successful in generating co-funding, which served as a testament to its relevance and success. The evaluator further pointed out that the project had initially been planned to cover only four country peer reviews but had, in the end, covered 12 countries. With regard to sustainability, the evaluator judged from the responses of competition authorities that most of the agencies would continue to use the recommendations in the reports long after the project had been completed. For example, in Serbia, aspiration for membership in the European Union

had helped in the implementation of most of the UNCTAD peer review recommendations and also generated substantial funding from the European Union for follow-up assistance. Finally, however, the evaluator noted that in order to materialize benefits, there should be a greater focus on follow-up technical assistance and additional funding for such assistance.

22. Based on the findings and conclusions, the evaluator proposed the following recommendations: (a) coordination with other international organizations should be enhanced in order to be able to add leverage in the pursuit of policy reforms; (b) increased focus on training and technical capacity-building is important and more in-depth technical assistance should be provided only if there is a clear commitment by Governments to implement the recommendations, including with regard to increased funding for agencies; (c) mentoring partnerships between competition authorities from developing and developed countries, involving other agencies as key allies and partners in the peer review process, should be supported; (d) post-intervention reviews of achievements following the peer review should be introduced, whereby beneficiary countries should report to the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Competition Law and Policy in two to three years' time following delivery of an assistance package; (e) peer review reports should be more widely distributed in beneficiary countries, to ensure that they reach a wider circle of journalists, civil society groups and consumer unions; (f) UNCTAD should work closely with development partners to ensure that extra budgetary funding is secured early enough for the delivery of follow-up technical assistance.

### (iv) External evaluation: Integration of the trade dimension in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (United Nations Development Account, project 10/11S); Enhancing national ownership of trade-related assistance in United Nations country-level development plans (United Nations Development Account, project 10/11AV)

23. Project 10/11S and project 10/11AV were operational during the periods 2010–2013 and 2012–2013, respectively. The goal of the two projects was to increase policy coherence between the international economic environment and domestic development goals and interlinkages between trade and the sectoral components of national development plans. The projects aimed to enhance national capacities to formulate United Nations assistance plans that take due account of economic and trade-related issues and to coordinate the required inter-agency actions in view of national development goals. The main activity was the organization of one national and four regional workshops based on dedicated training materials, and a discussion forum held in Geneva, Switzerland. The projects also enabled the conduct of three online courses on the trade dimension in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, which had 390 participants and a graduation rate of 72 per cent.

24. The evaluation confirmed the relevance of the projects. The evaluator found that the projects suited the needs of those countries in which the next iteration of their United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks was under discussion and/or revision. The evaluator noted that the activities had reached the targeted quantitative outputs in most instances, but that gender-related aspects had not been tracked by the projects. With regard to effectiveness, the evaluator found that positive outcomes from the projects could already be observed in one of the participating countries. The evaluator further found that there were certain mechanisms in place to sustain the projects' outputs and results, such as an online discussion platform that would soon be operational. However, the evaluator pointed out that the design of the projects showed room for improvement, in particular

related to the logical framework elements – the level of results, choice of indicators and sources of verification. The evaluator found that the online training was useful in developing individual knowledge but weak in institutional capacity-building, and that the total number of participants seemed to be dispersed too thinly across many countries. Finally, the evaluator recognized that, while a targeted selection of qualified participants in project activities would have contributed towards enhanced effectiveness, the selection of participants was usually at the discretion of the respective participating Governments.

25. Based on the findings and conclusions, the evaluator proposed recommendations that included the following: (a) coherence in project design between project objectives, intended results, budgets and time frames should be ensured, and project designs should not accommodate overambitious objectives; (b) UNCTAD should be focused in interventions, by targeting the correct participants from each institution in each country, in order to create a critical mass of capacities, thus contributing towards institutional capacity-building; (c) an exit strategy and risk analysis should be sufficiently integrated into project designs; (d) to enhance gender mainstreaming in future projects, UNCTAD should consider organizing a seminar on gender monitoring and provide readily usable tools for project officers to integrate gender perspectives into future project designs and implementation; (e) UNCTAD should collaborate with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to explore ways of continuing to offer online courses and to promote the courses to Governments that have already expressed their interests in training their employees in the subject area.

# II. Lessons learned

26. Lessons learned from the previous report on the evaluation of UNCTAD activities (TD/B/WP/254) remain a recommended reference for programme managers and project officers in designing and managing their programmes and projects. The evaluations in the current report have led to several new notable lessons learned for consideration, as detailed in the following paragraphs.

## A. Lessons learned on project design

27. Project managers should design mechanisms into their project plans that will be conducive to attracting follow-up actions and funding, such as building a partnership approach into project implementation, in order to contribute to generating tangible results and ensuring sustainability.

28. A gender-responsive stakeholder analysis undertaken at the project design stage will ensure the involvement and effective participation of all relevant actors, leading to the reflection of their needs in project designs.

29. Project managers need to consider the merits of breadth versus depth when determining the number of participants and participating countries in a project's activities. There should be a reasonable balance attained, particularly if the objective of a project is to build capacities, in order to ensure that the activities bring about concrete changes and benefits to the targeted beneficiaries. Pursuing an inclusive approach will likely lead only to awareness-raising.

30. The use of in-house expertise should be systematically designed into projects to leverage the knowledge gained from and achievements and best practices of other projects.

31. United Nations Development Account projects should be well aligned with the work plan and programme of the implementing project officers and the

responsible division. This will ensure that adequate staff resources are specifically allocated to manage the projects and contribute towards synergies during project implementation, as well as the sustainability of project outcomes.

32. The early engagement of stakeholders at the project design stage through consultations and during the conduct of a needs assessment exercise would enhance the relevance of a project and increase buy-in by stakeholders.

### B. Lessons learned on implementation approaches

33. Project managers are encouraged to use participative and interactive approaches in the forums and workshops that they organize, in order to encourage the active engagement of participants in such activities, while at the same time obtaining their buy-in on the subject matter.

### C. Lessons learned on monitoring and evaluation

34. A baseline study should be included in all projects as part of the project preparatory phase, in order to enable a more impact-oriented monitoring and evaluation process.

35. A monitoring plan that includes the collection of gender disaggregated data will better allow the tracking of progress against gender objectives, as stipulated in most project plans.

## III. Evaluation plan for 2015

36. The Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the Programme Budget fulfils an important oversight function through its consideration each year of external evaluations of UNCTAD programmes. The subject of the evaluation is usually in accordance with a three-year evaluation plan that is approved by the Trade and Development Board. In accordance with established practice, following decision 2003/7 of 19 September 2003 (see TD/B/50/12-TD/B/WP/169, chapter I, section B) to invite the secretariat to propose future evaluation plans, the secretariat proposed an evaluation plan for 2013–2015 that was considered by member States at the sixty-third session of the Working Party. In line with the decision of the Trade and Development Board at its fifty-ninth session regarding measures to strengthen results-based management and the evaluation of programmes of work, the Working Party agreed at its sixty-third session to a trial implementation of the new approach of ensuring the systematic evaluations of UNCTAD subprogrammes.

37. Accordingly, in 2013, the Working Party considered the external evaluation of subprogramme 1 and, in line with the outcome of the Working Party at its sixty-fifth session, will consider the external evaluation of subprogramme 2 at its sixty-eighth session.

38. Also at its sixty-fifth session, the Working Party agreed to take note of the evaluation plan proposed for 2015, which will be reconsidered at its sixty-eighth session. For 2015, the external evaluation of subprogramme 3 on international trade has been proposed.

39. The Working Party is invited to review this next iteration of the evaluation plan and to submit its conclusions and recommendations to the Trade and Development Board.